Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a first end;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a second end, the first and second ends forming part of a junction;

a cap layer disposed over the magnetically soft layer such that the junction has a slope of less than forty-five degrees when measured at a location seven nanometers below a top of the cap layer;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to at least the second end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer; and

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer

wherein the magnetic sensor has at least one set of characteristics selected from a group consisting of the following sets of characteristics:

(a) an electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer;

(b) a first magnetically soft shield, and a first electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the first magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer has a first uniform thickness; and

(c) a second magnetically soft shield, and a second electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the second magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the second electrically insulating read gap layer has a second uniform thickness of about fifty nanometers or less.

2. (Original) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the underlayer has a thickness that is at least eighty-percent as large as the thickness of the adjacent magnetically hard layer.

3. (Original) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the underlayer has a thickness that is at least as large as the thickness of the adjacent magnetically hard layer.

4. (Original) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the underlayer includes an amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

5. (Original) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the underlayer includes an electrically conductive amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

6. (Original) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the underlayer includes an electrically insulating amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

7. (Original) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the underlayer and magnetically hard layer have a combined thickness that is at least about three-quarters the height of the junction.

8. (Previously Presented) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the sensor further includes the electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

9. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a first end;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field,

the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a second end, the first and second ends forming part of a junction;

a cap layer disposed over the magnetically soft layer such that the junction has a slope of less than forty-five degrees when measured at a location seven nanometers below a top of the cap layer;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to at least the second end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer;

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer; and

a dielectric layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

10. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a first end;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field,

the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a second end, the first and second ends forming part of a junction;

a cap layer disposed over the magnetically soft layer such that the junction has a slope of less than forty-five degrees when measured at a location seven nanometers below a top of the cap layer;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to at least the second end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer;

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer; and

a resistive layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

11. (Previously Presented) The sensor of claim 1, wherein the sensor further includes the first magnetically soft shield, and the first electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the first magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer has the uniform thickness.

12. (Previously Presented) The sensor of claim 11, wherein the read gap layer thickness is about fifty nanometers or less.

13. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending a first distance in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending a second distance in the track-width direction, the second distance being not more than half the first distance;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to an end of the magnetically soft layer, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer; and

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer;

wherein the magnetic sensor has at least one set of characteristics selected from a group consisting of the following sets of characteristics:

(a) an electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer;

(b) a first magnetically soft shield, and a first electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the first magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer has a first uniform thickness; and

(c) a second magnetically soft shield, and a second electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the second magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic

layer, wherein the second electrically insulating read gap layer has a second uniform thickness of about fifty nanometers or less.

14. (Original) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the underlayer has a thickness that substantially aligns the magnetically hard layer and the magnetically soft layer.

15. (Original) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the underlayer has a thickness that is at least about as large as the thickness of the adjacent magnetically hard layer.

16. (Original) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the underlayer includes an amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

17. (Original) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the underlayer includes an electrically conductive amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

18. (Original) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the underlayer includes an electrically insulating amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

19. (Original) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the end forms part of a contiguous junction, and the underlayer and magnetically hard layer have a combined thickness that is at least about three-quarters the height of the contiguous junction.

20. (Previously Presented) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the sensor further includes the electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

21. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending a first distance in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending a second distance in the track-width direction, the second distance being not more than half the first distance;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to an end of the magnetically soft layer, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer; and

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer; and

a dielectric layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

22. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending a first distance in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending a second distance in the track-width direction, the second distance being not more than half the first distance;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to an end of the magnetically soft layer, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer; and

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer; and

a resistive layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

23. (Previously Presented) The sensor of claim 13, wherein the sensor further aincludes the first magnetically soft shield, and the first electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the first magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer has a uniform thickness.

24. (Previously Presented) The sensor of claim 23, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer thickness is about fifty nanometers or less.

25. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in an end, such that the antiferromagnetic layer, ferromagnetic layer and magnetically soft layer form a stack having a thickness that is less than an amount that the antiferromagnetic layer extends in the track-width direction beyond the end;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to the end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer; and

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer;

wherein the magnetic sensor has at least one set of characteristics selected from a group consisting of the following sets of characteristics:

(a) an electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer;

(b) a first magnetically soft shield, and a first electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the first magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer has a first uniform thickness; and

(c) a second magnetically soft shield, and a second electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the second magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the second electrically insulating read gap layer has a second uniform thickness of about fifty nanometers or less.

26. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, wherein the underlayer has a thickness that substantially aligns the magnetically hard layer and the magnetically soft layer.

27. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, wherein the underlayer has a thickness that is at least about as large as the thickness of the adjacent magnetically hard layer.

28. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, wherein the underlayer includes an amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

29. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, wherein the underlayer includes an electrically conductive amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

30. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, wherein the underlayer includes an electrically insulating amorphous layer and a crystalline layer.

31. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, wherein the end forms part of a contiguous junction, and the underlayer and magnetically hard layer have a combined thickness that is at least about three-quarters the height of the contiguous junction.

32. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, further comprising an electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

33. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in an end, such that the antiferromagnetic layer, ferromagnetic layer and magnetically soft layer form a stack having a thickness that is less than an amount that the antiferromagnetic layer extends in the track-width direction beyond the end;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to the end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer;

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer; and

a dielectric layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

34. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in an end, such that the antiferromagnetic layer, ferromagnetic layer and magnetically soft layer form a stack having a thickness that is less than an amount that the antiferromagnetic layer extends in the track-width direction beyond the end;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to the end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer;

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer; and

a resistive layer disposed between the ferromagnetic layer and the magnetically soft layer.

35. (Original) The sensor of claim 25, further comprising a magnetically soft shield, and an electrically insulating read gap layer disposed between the magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the read gap layer has a uniform thickness.

36. (Original) The sensor of claim 35, wherein the read gap layer thickness is not more than about fifty nanometers.

37. (Currently Amended) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending a first distance in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic pinned layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer;

a ferromagnetic free layer disposed over the pinned ferromagnetic layer, the free layer having a magnetization that rotates due to an applied magnetic field, the free layer extending a second distance between two ends in the track-width direction, the second distance being not more than half the first distance;

a pair of magnetically hard bias layers, each bias layer disposed adjacent to a different one of the ends and providing a magnetic field to stabilize the magnetization of the adjacent end; and

a pair of underlayers, each underlayer disposed adjacent to a different one of the hard bias layers to increase alignment between the adjacent bias layer and the free layer;

wherein the magnetic sensor has at least one set of characteristics selected from a group consisting of the following sets of characteristics:

(a) an electrically conductive, nonmagnetic layer disposed between the ferromagnetic free layer and the ferromagnetic pinned layer;

(b) a first magnetically soft shield, and a first electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the first magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the first electrically insulating read gap layer has a first uniform thickness; and

(c) a second magnetically soft shield, and a second electrically insulating read gap layer adjoining the second magnetically soft shield and the antiferromagnetic layer, wherein the second electrically insulating read gap layer has a second uniform thickness of about fifty nanometers or less.

38. (Canceled)

39. (Canceled)

40. (Previously Presented) A magnetic sensor comprising:

an antiferromagnetic layer extending in a track-width direction;

a ferromagnetic layer disposed over the antiferromagnetic layer, the ferromagnetic layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to an applied magnetic field and extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a first end;

a magnetically soft layer disposed over the ferromagnetic layer, the magnetically soft layer having a magnetization that rotates in response to the applied magnetic field, the magnetically soft layer extending in the track-width direction to terminate in a

second end, the first and second ends forming part of a junction, the junction having a slope of at least twenty and not more than forty degrees at the magnetically soft layer;

a magnetically hard layer disposed adjacent to at least the second end, the magnetically hard layer having a magnetization that remains substantially fixed in response to the applied magnetic field, to stabilize the magnetization of the end of the magnetically soft layer; and

an underlayer disposed between the antiferromagnetic layer and the magnetically hard layer;

wherein the magnetic sensor has at least one set of characteristics selected from a group consisting of the following sets of characteristics:

(a) the underlayer has a first thickness that is at least eighty-percent as large as the thickness of the adjacent magnetically hard layer;

(b) the underlayer has a second thickness that is at least as large as the thickness of the adjacent magnetically hard layer;

(c) the underlayer and magnetically hard layer have a combined thickness that is at least about three-quarters the height of the junction; and

(d) the underlayer has a fourth thickness that substantially aligns the magnetically hard layer and the magnetically soft layer.